

## Classroom Controversy: Evolution vs. Intelligent Design

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Should the idea of intelligent design—or at least the mention of its existence—have a place in science curricula throughout the country? It's one of the passionate debates in recent years, and centers on the teaching of Darwin's theory of evolution in classrooms.

In the past two years, both Texas and Louisiana have taken steps that allow science classes to consider other evolution theories, and state legislatures in Florida, Missouri and Mississippi are gearing up to consider some form of the debate surrounding the inclusion of intelligent design in science classes, perhaps this year.

Want a refresher on the debate? Here's what you need to know.

Charles Darwin's theory of evolution proposed that all living things can be traced to the same microscopic organisms. This form of life changed and mutated over time, with natural selection explaining the survival of the strongest of the species. Intelligent design, on the other hand, questions evolution as the answer for the creation of the universe because too many aspects of evolution cannot be explained by natural selection, arguing for an "intelligent cause" to instead logically account for the creation of all things.

The battle over intelligent design reached the courts in 2005 with the school board in Dover, Penn., when a district court judge struck down a statement endorsing intelligent design as violating the separation between church and state.

The issue cooled nationally for several years, but in Texas last year, the State Board of Education voted to allow school districts to include critiques and analysis of scientific topics taught to students, which would pave the way for the mention of intelligent design.

Two years ago, the Louisiana Legislature passed the Louisiana Science Education Act, which mandates the Board of Education to "assist teachers, principals and other school administrators to create and foster . . . critical thinking skills, logical analysis and open and objective discussion of scientific theories."

Here's a brief look at the case for intelligent design, as laid out by Casey Luskin, policy analyst for the Discovery Institute, a think tank in Seattle that has been a proponent of intelligent design.

1. **Other viewpoints about evolution should be introduced in school.** This is not a debate about intelligent design vs. evolution and which is right and which is wrong, Luskin said. This is about "whether students will learn about scientific criticisms of evolution in school."
2. **Intelligent design is science.** The main argument of evolution supporters is that intelligent design is merely religious content disguised as science, but isn't supported by scientists. That's not true, says Luskin. In the battle in Texas, intelligent design proponents introduced 100 articles of peer-reviewed work talking about intelligent design and a statement supporting intelligent design signed by more than 850 PhD scientists.
3. **Excluding intelligent design promotes bad science.** While evolution supporters claim intelligent design has no scientific basis, Luskin said what is happening in most parts of the country is that the scientific method is being ignored. "Part of science is debate and asking hard questions," Luskin said. "The day we stop asking hard questions (like criticisms of evolution) is the day science fails our society. Parents should be concerned that students are being misinformed and not being taught to think like scientists."
4. **Why not teach both?** Luskin said he understands that many people disagree with his position, and that's fine. "I respect the fact that they disagree with me and they think neo-Darwinism is the best explanation and it should be taught in public schools." The difference between the two sides, he said, is that Darwin proponents don't want intelligent design even mentioned in school. "I also think students should learn about the evidence that challenges Darwin."



Here's the opposite side of the argument from Daniel Mach, director of litigation for the American Civil Liberties Union Program on Freedom of Religion and Belief.

1. **Intelligent design is not science.** There is no credible scientific body that supports intelligent design because it is not a scientific theory, Mach said. "These are the latest steps in a long series of religiously motivated attacks on the teaching of evolution in public schools. Science class can and should be grounded by the rules of science. These are attempts to manufacture scientific controversy."
2. **The Constitution forbids promoting religion in school.** "The Constitution bars public school teachers from advancing theology by presenting scientific disagreements where none legitimately exists," Mach said. The Establishment Clause "sensibly forbids the government and especially public schools from taking sides in theological debates. Those are properly left to individual and families, not bureaucrats and public school officials," Mach said.
3. **Science is alive and well in school.** Mach said he does agree with Lusk on one point: True scientific criticism should be taught in school. But he disagreed that intelligent design deserves even a mention in school because it is religion and not science. "Look, public schools already encourage critical thinking by students and scientifically sound theories are already allowed in school."
4. **The real argument is religious freedom, not teaching freedom.** While intelligent design proponents claim teachers are being muzzled in classes, Mach said that's just an attempt to emotionalize the issue. The reason intelligent design isn't taught in classrooms is that students should not be bullied into believing an agenda presented by the teacher, principal or school district. "The government itself must steer clear of any religious endorsements."